

Attachment A

Writing Focus Group Discussion Summary October 20, 2004

Alternate years for on-demand writing and the portfolio. This will spread writing across grade levels, increase accountability for writing at additional grades, provide more diagnostic information, inform instructional practice, provide a sense of longitudinal progress, provide better comparative data of portfolio writing and on-demand writing and support a school wide writing program where children write across genres and across content areas.

Expand the performance levels for writing to more consistently align with other content areas and to give credit for student progress within a performance level. Example: Novice non-performing, novice middle, novice high, apprentice low, apprentice middle, apprentice high, proficient, and distinguished. This would make writing scores more consistent with other content areas and allow scores to reflect the growth students/schools actually reach. At present, a student/school actually is likely to improve only 2 levels – to apprentice, then to proficient, since distinguished is not the expected goal for most students. This will also improve scoring accuracy and the tendency to inflate scores.

Create new standards for writing to align with the new design of the writing assessment and to address the concern regarding the middle school standards and the distinguished standards.

Reallocate weight for on-demand and the portfolio and factor in a small weight for multiple-choice. Weighting should be consistent with the vision for a school-wide writing program and the focus for instruction. Decrease the portfolio weight and increase the on-demand weight.

On-demand writing. For on-demand writing include response to text aligned with content areas as a choice. Provide more prompts and more choice for students (e.g., at least options for choice). Provide more variety in purpose, audience and form (e.g., content area/workplace interest). Provide choices at the high school level that help students enter into the prompt based on interest. Include workplace writing such as writing memos/proposals for an authentic purpose. In the directions to students consider including a reminder to create a purpose and audience for their response.

If there is an on-demand prompt at Grade 11 or 12, include a choice like the SAT/ACT prompts. Personal essays options, for example, should engage the students, some who will transition to college and others who will transition

directly to the workplace. SAT/ACT prompts allow entry into the prompt from the student's personal background/strengths.

Provide parallel on-demand prompts to the categories for the portfolio (e.g., include literary as a choice but not a requirement). Broaden transactive prompts to align with all categories of the portfolio.

Consider tying on-demand to content, for example, at 11th grade tie to arts and humanities. This provides the writer with the opportunity for richer idea development. It also would increase the likelihood of content-based teachers attending to writing across the curriculum appropriate for their content areas.

Make sure that the on-demand prompts are not artificial topics that do not allow for adequate idea development.

Leave the time at 90 minutes for completion of the on-demand prompt as in the current assessment.

Maintain a balance of on-demand writing and portfolio writing so that a school's writing program does not become driven by artificial prompts rather than a full discourse of writing.

Portfolio. Students should maintain a **working writing portfolio** that includes writing across genres and for authentic purposes, including workplace writing at the high school level.

Broaden the categories for portfolio entries to be more inclusive and to increase student choice on purpose, audience and form. Consider how the writing categories align with the reading categories. Teachers are now familiar with the current categories, so maintain some familiarity for teachers. At the elementary level the short story should be a choice and not required. Analytical, technical and workplace writing should be included at the high school level at a minimum. Allow students to include entries that are connected to student interest and a student's Individual Graduation Plan. Consider entries that have students solving problems and provide analysis.

Make The Letter to the Reviewer in the portfolio a student choice rather than a requirement. Reflective writing should be part of the portfolio; however, students should have more choice in how they convey reflection rather than the Letter to the Reviewer. Narratives, transactive, personal writing, etc., can all be reflective. Reflective writing is included in the *Program of Studies*. Consider adding a reflective piece at 12th grade to acknowledge that reflective thinking is critical to success in life and to convey that concern about the development of that skill as a writer. Reflective writing could be a content piece where students reflect on themselves as thinkers rather than as writers. Letter to the Reviewer is valuable at middle school level connecting reading and writing and

communicating growth as a writer. The Letter to the Reviewer reflects investment in the portfolio, provides a good opportunity to stand back and evaluate learning experiences. Professional portfolios often include a reflective piece. Parents also have provided feedback that they like the Letter to the Reviewer.